

DOBRUJA. AN EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER REGION

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Abstract: Since January 1st 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became full rights members of the European Union. Thus, Dobruja, an important part of the Pontic coastal sector and a territory divided between the two countries, gained the status of EU border space and became a strategic geopolitical area. Today, after more than 130 years since Dobruja has been divided by the Russian Empire, the possibility of reunification emerged. The adherence of the two states to the Schengen Agreement will eradicate the internal border and will erase all the disputes or polemics on who is the rightful owner of this territory.

Key words: Dobruja, cross-border region, Schengen area, regional identity

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INTRODUCTION

Dobruja is a well individualized region from a physical point of view. It is placed between the lower Danube (west), the Chilia Arm (north), the Beli Lom and Kamchiya rivers (south) and the Black Sea (east). The Dobrujan area engrafts on the territory of two countries: Romania and Bulgaria (figure 1). Northern Dobruja (known as Dobrogea) belongs to Romania, while Southern Dobruja is part of Bulgaria (the Bulgarians called it Dobrudzha and the Romanians, Cadrilater).

The administrative structure of Dobruja consists of: two Romanian “județe” (Tulcea and Constantza) and two Bulgarian “oblast” (Dobrich and Silistra).

ELEMENTS OF REGIONAL IDENTITY

The historical identity

The territorial identity of the province was outlined early in the history. It was imposed by the Romans and then affirmed by the Ottoman Empire after the 15th century. Searching through the Bulgarian historiography, Constantin Tudor (2005) found the following approaches referring to the history of Dobruja (summarized by the academician D. Anghelov in the introduction to the volume "Dobroudza. Etudes ethno-culturelles" Sofia, 1978):

- In the 6th century Dobruja was no longer a Roman province.
- After the year 600 A.D., the Slavs and the Protobulgarians have colonized, in mass, an area devoid of any population.
- Except the period between the end of 10th century (971 AD) and the early 13th century, Dobruja was part of the Bulgarian territory, till 1878 A.D. when the northern part of Dobruja was included into the borders of Romania.
- Dobruja is the region most closely related to the history of the Bulgarian people, a model of Bulgarian culture and administration.



Figure 1. The position of Dobrudja.
(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>)

The Romanian side contradicts these claiming:

- The continuity of the population in the territory after the withdrawal of the Roman Army and Administration.

- The existence in the Middle Ages of several small states run by locals. The most important of these was “Cărvunei Country”, located on the Black Sea coast, between Mangalia and Varna, first mentioned in 1230. The Cărvunei Country was a political structure which, for almost two decades (1348-1386), brought together the “countries” between the Danube and the Black Sea under the government of Dobrota.

- The fact that was part of the “voivodat” (a political structure) led by Mircea the Old from 1388 until 1418. The evidence is the prince’s title “Terrarum Dobrota despotus Trist et Dominus” in translation “oppressor of the land of Dobrota and master of Tristi” (Tiristi – today’s Kaliakra).

At the beginning of the 15th century the Ottoman Empire reserved for Dobrujan territory an administrative identity as a saugeac within Rumelia Vilaiet and later as vilaiet (the Babadag Vilaiet or Silistra Vilaiet).

The Russian Empire also recognized the individuality of the province, when it promised Romania for entering into the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, the whole Dobruja. Subsequently, Russia interested in occupying the counties

from southern Bessarabia (for access to the Danube river) split the province - two thirds for Romania and one third for Bulgaria - along a border that had no valid argument and caused many disputes.

The toponymical identity

Following the inventory of the toponyms made on 738 maps of the old Dobruja [note of 18th-19th century] were found 3776 toponyms with different origins: 2338 Turkish and Tartars, 1260 Romanian, 145 Russian, 28 Bulgarian, 4 Greek and one Hungarian (AP Arbore, 1922) – figure 2.

The high frequency of Turkish toponyms is the result of almost five centuries of Ottoman domination. During this period the Ottoman Empire had a policy of replacing old names with Turkish or Tartars toponyms. The phenomenon occurred even in the case of settlements inhabited, in majority, by Romanians. The strong impact of Turkish toponyms can still be seen today in names like: Carasu, Murfatlar, Adamclisi, Siutghiol, Babadag, etc.

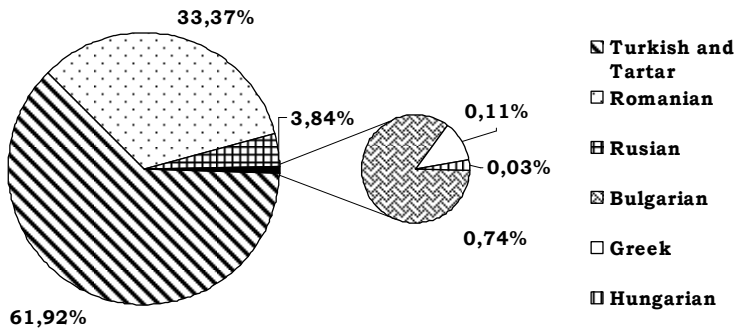


Figure 2. Toponymical structure of the historical province of Dobruja

The Romanian toponyms follow in the hierarchy. Much more numerous than the Bulgarian ones, the Romanian toponyms confirm the presence and continuity of Romanian inhabitants in Dobruja.

The word "Dobruja" itself has generated a big polemic. Over the time, were outlined at least two origins: a Turkish origin and a Slavic (Bulgarian) one. The most likely possibility seems to be the Turkish one, having in its turn two possible origins:

a) From the old layer of Cumana, which has also transmitted toponyms like Bugeac, Bucegi, Deliorman, Teleorman. According to Ion Ionescu de la Brad (1850), Dobruja means "country with no forest", and Constantin Brătescu (1928) identifies it with the "central steppe, as understood by the people living in our province from ancient times ...".

b) From the 14th century Turkish. According to the same Constantin Brătescu (1928), "we find Dobrotitsa as leader of the province [...]. As he became vassal of the Turks his country was given the name Dobruġi-illi, the Dobruġi province, meaning Dobruja". The explanation would be the habit of Turks to name "a country after his ruler".

Other hypotheses state that the name derived from the name of the "Byzantine despot" (according C-tin Brătescu, 1928) or of the "Bulgarian knez" (M. Jecov and I. Zanov, 2001) Dobrotitsa (also known as Dobrotici or Dobrotiță, in both Romanian and Bulgarian writings or Dobrota, only in Bulgarian

sources). Mihail Jecov and Ivan Zanov (2001) say that: "Today's Dobruja has the name of a great man «Dobrota»... his name ... is Slavic".

The Ethno-demographic identity

Before the Russian-Turkish war (1877-1878) Dobruja was characterized by a great ethnic diversity. There were eleven ethnic groups living together. Most of them were Turkish and Tartars, followed by Romanians and Bulgarians. The Valley of the Danube river with its tributary valleys, the delta and the terraces of the Razim lake system were areas populated by Romanians. The Bulgarians were concentrated in the villages from the central south-eastern part of Tulcea county, towards Halmiris Bay, and in the villages from the southern part of Dobruja - the current territory of Bulgaria. This ethnic structure is supported by Romanian sources (Ion Ionescu de la Brad) as well as by the Bulgarian ones, represented by Lubomir J. Miletici, M. J. Jecov and Zahov. In order to confirm these views we have attached a fragment from the map "Populations de la Turquie d'Europe", an ethnic map of the Balkans made by French geographer Elisée Reclus at the end of the 19th century (figure 3).

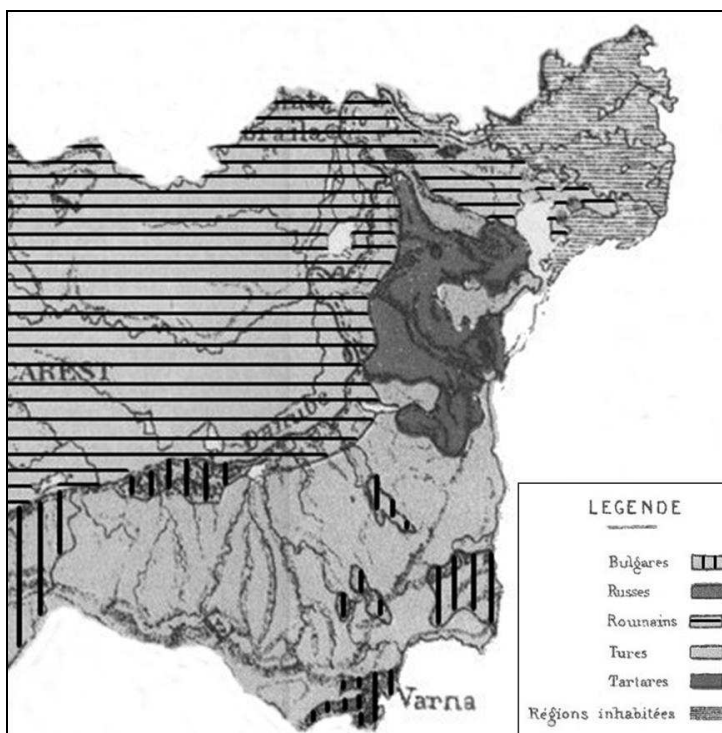


Figure 3. The Ethnic Map of Dobruja (1876) according to the French geographer Elisée Reclus in „Nouvelle Géographie Universelle” (1875-1894).

(Source: www.promacedonia.org, modified)

Other groups sharing the same area: the Armenians (with important nuclei in Silistra and Tulcea), the Russian-Lipovans (in areas bordering the Danube Delta and the Razim lagoon), the Zaporozhian Cossacks (set in the triangle of land between the Razim Lake and Danube Delta), Germans (refugees from the Tsardom of Russia, who spread to the south of Bazargic), Hebrews and Greeks (particularly

in port cities). Out of strategic reasons, the Ottoman Empire brought to Dobruja Circassians (originally from the Caucasus, of Islamic religion). The circulation of people and goods has also brought: Arabs, Gypsies, Albanians, etc.

After the dividing of Dobruja, in 1878, the Governments of The Romanian Kingdom and of The Autonomous Principality of Bulgaria, started an intense process of colonization (meaning: sending people into low-inhabited regions of their own country - Nicoară V., 2006). Citizens from all regions inhabited by Romanians and Bulgarians, were relocated in Dobruja. This changed the ethnic structure in a fundamental way during 1878-1913 – figures 4 & 5.

After the annexation of Northern Dobruja, the Romanian state came into possession of a large area of fertile land with no population to labour it (since many of the Turks and Tartars left the province after the war). In order to capitalize the agricultural area, the government decided to give land to all the veterans of the Independence War and their families in this region. In this way, in Northern Dobruja settled Romanians from all over the Kingdom and from the territories under Habsburg dominion: Transylvania and Banat.

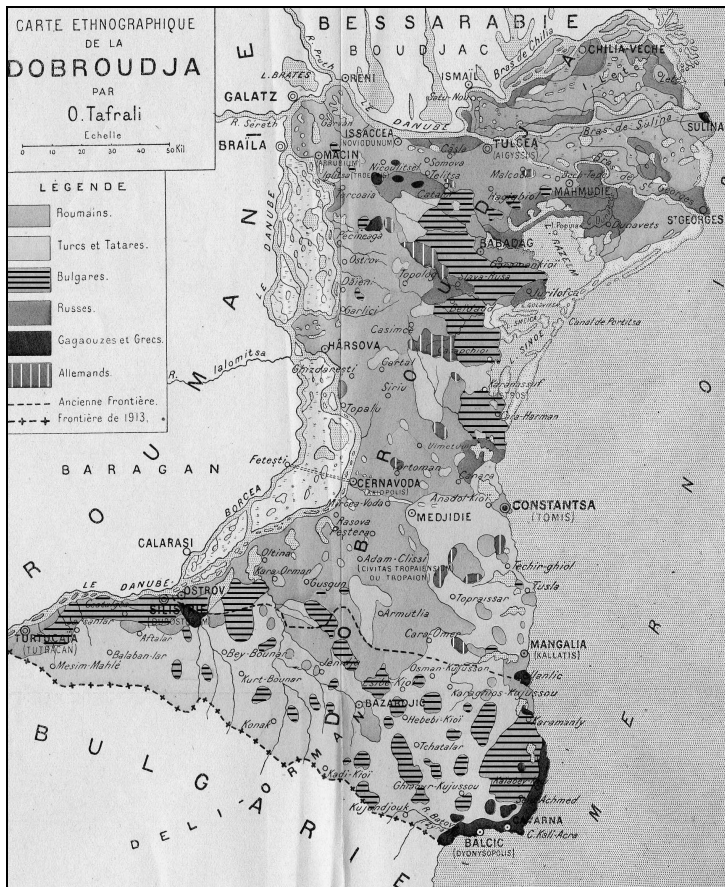


Figure 4. The Ethnic Map of Dobruja (1918) according to the Orest Tafrali.
(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>, modified)

The direct colonization of South Dobruja was made with Bulgarian and mountaineers families from various parts of the Balkans and from the

Prebalkan territory of Targovishte – Shuman – Kötel. Thus explains, the ethnic diversity of the Bulgarian population in Dobruja and its diverse folklore (Peter Konstandinov, 2001). He identifies like major groups: the Balkandjii (from Kötel and Zheravna) and the Trakiytsi (from the south-eastern regions Yambol, Adrianopole, Sliven). Today we can see the influence of the Thracian architecture from southern Bulgaria and of the cities from the Balkans mountain area in the “old centre” of Dobrich (a clear expression of the intake of population from the mentioned regions). In the same time, Bulgarian families or groups of families from southern Adrianopole and Zagora regions and from the eastern Balkans, were directed to Dobruja, Danube Delta and Bessarabia, in search of shelter and arable land (in a spontaneous way).

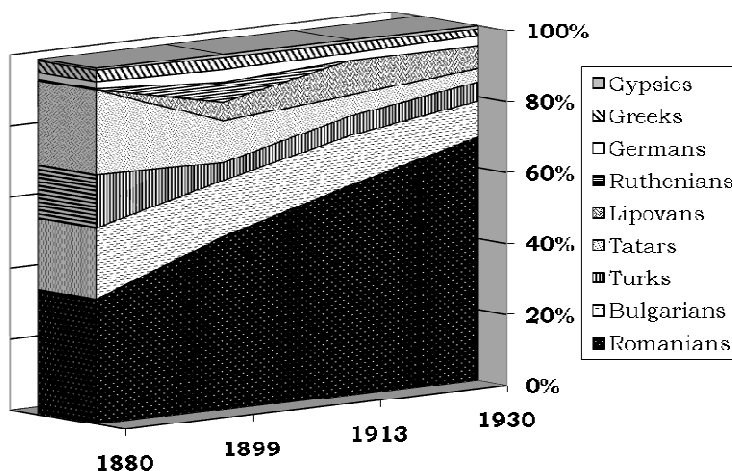


Figure 5. The numeric evolution of the principal ethnics in Romanian Dobrudja between 1881-1930

To this migration phenomenon was also associated the transhumance, a specific process for the Carpathians-Balkans area. Hundreds of flocks of sheep together with their shepherds came down, in autumn, from the mountain area of Mărginimea Sibiului, Gorj's Subcarpathians, Vrancei's Subcarpathians, Kotel, Medveh, Zheravha and the east of Balkans, to spent the winter in the plains and valleys of Dobruja.

EUROPEAN DOBRUJA

Since the 1st of January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria are members with full rights of the European Union. Along with them, the historical province of Dobruja became a border space of the EU.

Today, this space is marked by the existence in its limits of a borderline from Ostrov to Negru Vodă and further till Vama Veche. After the integration the frontier became less restrictive and there is the prospect of total extinction, in the next 5-7 years upon adherence to Shengen area (figure 6).

A particular attention was given to the following geopolitical and economic issues generated by the new status:

a) The need to secure the external border of the European Union (on the Danube, on the Ukrainian border and on the maritime coast) imposed, for both countries, the resizing of the border police and customs offices. The

intensification of border controls may cause a tense situation between Romania and Ukraine.

b) The abolishment of the customs restrictions and the free movement through Dobrujan border from/in Romania/Bulgaria generated:

- The intensification of cross-border movement of the borderers caused by the emotion the new political situation, the desire to know more about their neighbours and the immediate economic interest.

- The developing of cross-border economic activities. The price gap between the two countries determined a change of the supply sources from Constantza to Varna.

- The enhancement of real estate transactions and of the number of cars matriculated by Romanians in Bulgarian Dobruja due to low prices of land and houses and tax opportunities.

- The development of cultural, artistic and sporting cross-border exchanges in a joint action to assume a regional identity, a Dobrujan identity.

- The development of cross-border tourism especially towards the coast sector of Constanza-Varna.

c) The increasing European interest for the awareness and development of the region. Because of the new energetic resources (oil, gas, electricity) routes and NATO military bases which were establish on its territory, Dobruja assumed / acquired a geostrategic and military role in the area.



Figure 6. The United Dobrudja

CROSS-BORDER DOBRUJA

The Danube East Euroregion (also known as Dobruja-Danube Euroregion, figure 7) was established due to the similar economic and social development of the contiguous territories of Dobruja. It includes the Bulgarian districts of Silistra and Dobrich and the Romanian counties: Călărași, Ialomița and Constantza.

It is a structure of cross-border cooperation based on cooperation agreements between local government structures, local NGO's and business structures. The 24,177 sq km makes it the largest Euroregion from the Romanian-Bulgarian space and a medium one at an European level (Al. Ilieș, 2004).

Overall functionality and the integration of the Dobruja – Danube Euroregion into the political systems of the two states arise from the ratio between the number of inputs and outputs between integrated political systems, the ones crossing the state border (internal border of the EU) and the number of inputs/outputs going through the external border of the Euroregion, the ones connecting the Romanian and the Bulgarian part of the Euroregion with their national territory (Ilieș, Al., 2004). Thus the total number is:

- 13 input/output points, of which:
 - 5 roads: Vama Veche–Durankulak, Negru Vodă–Kardam, Ostrov–Siliștra, Călărași–Chiciu–Siliștra, Oltenița–Tutrakan;
 - 1 railroad: Negru Vodă–Kardam;
 - 5 ports: Oltenița, Tutrakan, Siliștra, Constanța, Varna;
 - 2 airports: Mihail Kogălniceanu–Constanța and Varna.
- 32 input/output passages through the outer limit of the region into national territory (9 in the Bulgarian sector and 23 in the Romanian sector).



Figure 7. Danube East Euroregion
(Source: Ilieș, Al., 2004, modified)

Due to its geographical position and accessibility to all types of communication ways, the most important center of the Euroregion is Constanța. The second most important city is Varna. Today, their hinterlands cross each other on the border, but in the near future is likely to become more

influential. A future pontic highway from Constanța to Varna will increase the functional role of the two “summer capitals” and will promote an urbanization trend. The Bucharest - Constanța (A2) Highway and the future bridge over the Danube between Călărași and Silistra will imposed the Romanian capital as a center of the Euroregion. A future movement on the north-south corridor which connects the Baltic and the ex-Soviet states with The Balkans and The East will be possible if in the Brăila area it is built an transdanubian bridge. In this case, Istanbul will became a polarization hyper center.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzed in a geopolitical context, Dobruja is a cross-border region whose identity is determined by:

- the historical identity and the evolution as a province in different state structures;
- the physical-geographical and environmental homogeneity on both sides of the border;
- the cultural, ethnographic and toponymical identity based on the great civilizations which passed on this territory and on the identical religion of the two regions (a Latin space influenced by the Slaves, with a strong Islamic mark);
- the common development of the administrative organization of the territory and the complementarity of urban and transport networks;
- the polarization of cross-border cooperation vectors in the systems developed somewhat symmetrical on both sides of the border.

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